

News Release

National Wildlife Refuge System



Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge

**Savanna District
7071 Riverview Road
Thomson, IL 61285**

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Duck Hunters Asked To Bring Birds To Avian Influenza Sampling Station

On October 21-22, biologists from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will be sampling hunter harvested ducks at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Big Slough Recreation Area boat ramp on Riverview Road in Thomson, Ill to test for highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). Though thousands of samples have already been collected and tested in the United States, no HPAI H5N1 – a virus that has killed wild birds and commercial poultry in Asia, Europe and Africa – has been detected in the U.S.

These tests are being conducted through a partnership between the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (ILDNR) and the USDA as part of an expanded wild bird monitoring program to detect HPAI in Illinois. Hunters in the local area are being asked for their voluntary cooperation in participating in this HPAI sampling effort. Biologists will simply conduct a cloacal swab of harvested birds. No birds or tissue will be collected. The swab samples will then undergo laboratory analysis. Results of the tests will not be known for approximately 7-10 days. All results are recorded at the state level in a national avian influenza database that is accessible to the public at: <http://wildlifedisease.nbii.gov/ai>

Hunters who use other boat ramps in the local area are encouraged to voluntarily bring their ducks to the Big Slough boat ramp on October 21-22 to be tested. Sampling a larger number of ducks increases the probability of identifying the presence of bird flu subtypes found in waterfowl that migrate through this area. Biologists are primarily interested in sampling mallard, shoveler, pintail, green-winged teal and scaup ducks. While the role of wild birds in transporting the HPAI H5N1 type is not clear, this surveillance effort will help to ensure early detection of the disease should it arrive in North America. Many other states are conducting similar monitoring programs.

Biologists will sample several other geographic sites throughout Illinois during the duck hunting season. Initial screen testing conducted during the September early teal season at the Rice Lake Conservation Area of Fulton County, indicated the possibility that samples collected from apparently healthy green-winged teal migrating through Illinois could be carrying both the H5 and N1 avian influenza subtypes. The confirmatory test results are still pending. However, it was confirmed during the initial testing that these birds did not contain the HPAI H5N1 virus that has spread through birds in Asia, Europe and Africa. For additional information on avian influenza surveillance in Illinois, consult the ILDNR website at: <http://dnr.state.il.us/pubaffairs/2006/october/avian.htm>